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Office of
Personnel Management

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MEMORANDUM TO HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS AND INDEPENDENT AGENCIES

SUBJECT: Policy Statement on Good Manners and Courtesy in
the United States Government

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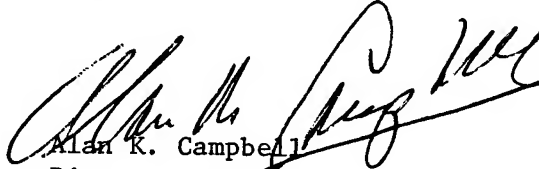
This memorandum transmits the Office of Personnel Management's policy statement on good manners and courtesy in the United States Government. While Federal employees generally display courtesy and good manners, it is important for agencies to continually stress the obligation of all employees to do so. The policy statement defines good manners and courtesy. I also call your special attention to the policy statement's specific comments on the responsibilities of Federal employees, supervisors, and managers for good manners, courtesy, civility and other appropriate, professional behavior in dealing with the public.

During the Hearings on Civil Service Reform, resulting in the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, Members of the Congress and others repeatedly emphasized the importance of good manners, courtesy, and prompt service which are essential for Federal employees. The Congress expressed its concerns with this matter in the Civil Service Reform Act, directly in 5 U.S.C. 4302(b)(1), and indirectly in at least two other sections of the Act. Representative Elliott H. Levitas, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Public Building and Grounds of the Public Works and Transportation Committee, who also serves on the House of Representatives' Government Operations Committee, has been continuously and strongly interested in the comprehensive problem of good manners and courtesy in government and all that the problem encompasses. OPM's own concern is reflected not only in these two communications but also in a Federal Personnel Manual Bulletin (FPM Bulletin) in process, a two-day course, multiple awards of special recognition, and a series of articles to be published in OPM periodicals and, presumably, in other journals as well.

I recommend that each of you take a leadership role in initiating these and other appropriate actions:

1. Issue a strong statement emphasizing the essentiality of eliminating any problems or shortcomings in discourtesy, incivility and poor service to the public;
2. Emphasize this policy as part of new-employee orientation covering the merit principles and codes of conduct;
3. Emphasize that all managers should bring this memorandum, the policy statement, and the forthcoming FPM Bulletin to the attention of all subordinate managers, supervisors and employees;

4. Pursue an active program of counseling by management at all levels to correct inappropriate or unprofessional behavior, and to develop positive attitudes on the importance of good manners, courtesy and prompt service in the United States Government.


Alan K. Campbell
Director

Attachment

POLICY STATEMENT ON GOOD MANNERS AND COURTESY
IN THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

For the purposes of this statement, good manners is an informal common-sense term meaning . . . a standard of behavior among Federal employees that is polite and considerate of others. Courtesy means the practice, day in and day out, of good manners. Both courtesy and good manners must be reflected in the direct dealings between Federal employees and the public as well as in indirect communications through correspondence and publications. The elements of courtesy and good manners are related to the specific work of the agency and each agency must therefore define appropriate behavior for its own employees.

Policy Statement

It is the policy of the United States Government that good manners and courtesy will be required of employees in all of their dealings with the public, Members of Congress and employees of their own agency and of other agencies. It is the responsibility of agency heads to make this fact known to all employees; to provide appropriate training; and, to supervise and review the conduct of employees for courtesy and good manners. Agencies will not tolerate discourteous behavior, and other forms of incivility which constitute unprofessional behavior and unacceptable conduct. The rude and offensive behavior of employees, whatever form of expression that behavior may take, tends to become an unnecessary obstacle to agencies in achieving their missions.

It is expected that Federal employees will generally perform courteously even if treated discourteously by members of the public. However, employees have the responsibility to refuse to violate the law or regulations or to give special advantage not called for by law. Employees should be periodically reminded that under the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-454 - October 13, 1978; 92 Stat. 111), ". . . courtesy demonstrated to the public . . . timeliness of performance . . . quality of work service . . ." and factors which constitute courtesy and civility in government may be integral parts of the criteria for performance appraisal. Employees must be informed about these requirements and provided appropriate supervision and/or training.

Responsibilities

A Federal employee is responsible for her/his own good behavior, in official capacity, including good manners, courtesy, and civility to the public. Supervisors and managers are responsible for creating and maintaining a positive and productive work environment in which employees are held fully accountable for discourteous service to the public and inappropriate, unprofessional or irresponsible behavior.

As part of this responsibility, supervisors and managers will take action to:

1. eliminate discourtesy, incivility, and poor service to the public;
2. bring to the attention of their subordinate supervisors and employees the policy stated in this bulletin; and
3. counsel subordinates and initiate appropriate action to correct a subordinate's inappropriate or unprofessional behavior.

4. pursue actively a positive approach to good manners, courtesy, and service in the United States Government that goes well beyond routine performance appraisal.

These activities by supervisors and managers would include, but would not be limited to:

1. the personal example of the supervisor or manager responsible,
2. orientation discussions and films,
3. on-the-job instruction,
4. informal commendation, and
5. awards for exceptional performance, highly constructive behavior, exemplary restraint, or patience in the area of good manners, courtesy, civility and concern for the public's legitimate needs and wishes.

OPM urges, and expects, the full cooperation of all Federal managers, supervisors, and employees in this important dimension of good and efficient administration in the United States Government. There can be no doubt that all of us are responsible and accountable to the President, the Congress, and the people of the United States for the degree of progress achieved in this important dimension.